

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 288 362

FL 017 002

AUTHOR Gleason, Jean Berko
 TITLE Language and Psychological Development.
 PUB DATE Apr 87
 NOTE 18p.; In: Papers and Reports on Child Language Development, Volume 26; see FL 017 001.
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Child Development; *Child Language; Cognitive Development; Emotional Development; *Individual Development; *Language Acquisition; *Language Role; Oral Language; Parent Child Relationship; Parent Influence; Psycholinguistics; *Social Development

ABSTRACT

Input language may have an effect on child development that goes far beyond language development alone. Language is the medium by which children acquire at least a portion of their sex role and social class or group characteristics, world view, and emotional and psychological well-being. Existing theories of psychological development ignore language, attempting to correlate parent behaviors and child outcomes without taking advantage of the substantial research on parent-child linguistic interactions. While developmental psychologists recognize that internalization of parental characteristics through identification is a broad and pervasive aspect of the young child's personality development, it is treated as a magical process in the literature of child development, ignoring language directed at the child as a likely vehicle for transmission of the parents' orientation and value system. Several decades of data on parent-child interaction gathered by linguists can and should be used to illustrate the role that language plays in child development. (MSE)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

Language and Psychological Development

Jean Berko Gleason

Boston University

Developmental psycholinguistics has existed as a recognized separate field of inquiry for about thirty years. During that time, an impressive literature has emerged, documenting children's acquisition of many facets of language. Yet, despite the 'psycho-' in psycholinguistics, the concerns in the field have had mostly to do with linguistics, rather than with psychology. Study of the relationship between psychology and language has been limited primarily to our attempts to determine the psychological processes involved in language acquisition: the role of memory or cognition, for instance. Howard Gardner (1982) lists questions posed by developmental psycholinguistics:

'What capacities must the child have in order to master the rules of phonology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics? How is it possible for the child to master the complex rules of language? Does language acquisition depend primarily on specifically linguistic skills, or does it call upon more general cognitive problem-solving capacities? Is the child innately equipped with fundamental linguistic knowledge, or is language acquisition a matter of starting from scratch?'

(p. 161)

The role that language plays in psychological development has not been a major concern; American psychology, and, in particular, American psychological theory, has been singularly unaffected by discoveries that to us have been momentous.

Psychology Texts

Developmental psychological theory has remained essentially nonverbal; at the same time, academic psycholinguists, whose research is devoted to verbal issues, are as likely to find themselves teaching in a psychology department as in a linguistics department. This leads to a kind of cognitive dissonance. It is not uncommon, for instance, for a child language researcher to have a teaching load that includes an introductory course in psychology, or a course in developmental, social, or personality psychology as well as a course in language development; the child we are called upon to describe in our psychology course is not the same child that we study in linguistics, and, of course, language development becomes one of many facets of development. Within psychology, the typical introductory text discusses language as part of a chapter on development. Or language may be included in a chapter on language and thought, and some part of the language section may include language development (cf Atkinson, Atkinson & Hilgard 1981).

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- * This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

E. Clark

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED288362

FL017002

Textbooks in developmental psychology typically treat language in one of two ways, depending on whether they are chronologically or topically ordered. In the chronological texts, language development is mentioned in several different chapters, for instance early language may be included as part of the section on infancy, and later acquisition may be included with information on development during early childhood. Cognition is treated in much the same way, except that cognitive development is described as well in the teen and adult years, whereas language is assumed to be sufficiently 'developed' by grade school that it needs no further discussion (cf Schell and Hall 1983).

In topically ordered texts, language is frequently the subject of an entire chapter or major section, one that is presented in parallel with units on personality development, sex role development, moral development, and cognitive development (cf Mussen, Conger, Kagan, & Huston 1984).

The role of language in these other spheres, in sex role development and in personality and moral development, is hardly mentioned or considered. In describing cognitive development, for instance, most books now present a Piagetian view in which infants and children progress through four stages: 1.) an early state where knowledge is acquired strictly through physical and sensory input (hence 'sensorimotor'); 2.) the preoperational stage characteristic of the preschool period, in which the child's understanding of the world is basically illogical and egocentric; 3.) a 'concrete operational' stage during the early school years in which the child can understand certain logical relationships, such as the fact that water poured from one glass to another does not change in quantity, even if one glass is much taller than the other. Children in the early grades become concrete operational because they have come to understand such operations as the conservation of liquid just described, as well as another set of basic principles, including class inclusion, seriation, and reversibility, so long as the objects being discussed are physically present (hence 'concrete'); 4) a final stage of cognitive development called 'formal operations', because the young person can now reason hypothetically and perform mental operations, such as algebra, without relying on any concrete objects.

What is perhaps most remarkable about the description of the way that these apparently universal stages evolve is the assumption that they arise out of an interaction with the physical world, as a result of the child's own exploration and experimentation with the world of things. They are nonlinguistic developments. Some researchers have pointed out the ways that language may complicate the demonstration of these abilities by using words such as 'same' and 'different' that preschoolers may not understand, and others have suggested clever research designs meant to get around the problems posed by lack of linguistic knowledge. In general, however, language is given little credit for contributing to cognitive development. (One American exception to the generality is

Jerome Bruner, who has frequently referred to the role of language.) Other areas of development receive similar treatment in developmental psychology texts. Explanations of how children acquire their personalities, their social class attributes, sex role, and moral system are remarkably nonverbal, and depend on a kind of osmosis whereby children 'take on' the characteristics of their parents. There is general agreement that parents are important forces in children's lives, that children early on become attached to their parents and ultimately become like them through a process sometimes called identification and sometimes call imitation, depending on the theoretical school involved, but the way that the parent actually conveys to the child the constructs that are to be taken on is never explicated.

Developmental Theories

Almost every text outlines three or four basic theories to account for the development of major facets of the personality:

1. Biological theory. The individual's genetic endowment, hormones and other innate factors are regarded as the major determinants of personality. Sexually dimorphic behavior, for instance, is produced as a consequence of hormonal influences on receptors in the brain (Money & Ehrhardt 1972).
2. Learning theory. Various forms of learning are invoked to account for the development of observed behavior: classical conditioning, operant conditioning, social learning and imitation. These theories hold that the child comes to take on the appropriate personality and sex role behavior by being rewarded for such behavior or by imitating attractive models (Skinner 1938; Mischel 1976). No inner constructs, such as a moral code or beliefs, are postulated.
3. Cognitive-structural theory. The major determinants of personality are believed to be embedded in the way the individual cognizes the world. The child comes to understand and interpret events, and ultimately, from those insights, comes to act accordingly. For instance, a little boy develops an understanding of the masculine role and of the fact that he is male, and then adapts his behavior and belief system to fit this concept (Kohlberg 1969).
4. Psychoanalytic theory. Personality is formed through a combination of one's genetic endowment ('biology is destiny') and the outcome of a universal family drama. The child goes through various psychodynamic stages: oral, anal, Oedipal, and, finally, genital. Children struggle with their feelings of desire for and fear of their parents and ultimately resolve their conflicts by becoming like their same sex parent (Freud 1957). They become like the parent by incorporating him or her, and, in so doing, acquire the parent's characteristics. Incorporation is a process of internalizing the parent.

Some of the cognitive dissonance mentioned earlier is bound to arise in the psycholinguist who teaches these various theories of child development, while realizing that in our work on language development we describe a quite different human being. Evidence from children's language is not used to support or refute the various theories, and evidence from parent's speech to children is not used to explain how major personality developments are eventuated. If, for instance, children are consumed (sorry) with a desire for food and other objects that can be mouthed, why would their speech at this stage not be dominated by a singularly oral character?

For instance, Freud's oral stage is invoked to characterize the infant up to the age of one and a half or two. According to this view, infants are concentrating their energies on their mouths, on eating and sucking; their oral needs must be satisfied, or they will become 'oral' adults--overeaters, smokers, and so on. (Alas, this also happens if they are too satisfied orally.) Freud's oral infant is the child whom we call Prelinguistic--an infant whose energies are concentrated on establishing communication with others. That greedy oral mouth is busy babbling and then uttering those first words. It is interesting to note that 'kitty' and 'blanket' are as liable to be early words as 'cookie' or something else to put in the mouth; if children's language is a window on their minds, it is odd that early vocabulary has not been analyzed as carefully for its psychodynamic content as for its phonology.

According to psychoanalytic theory, the anal stage follows the oral stage, beginning in the late second or early third year. The child's erogenous zone has moved south, and his or her energies are directed toward sphincter control, and, by extension, physical autonomy. This, of course, is the child we so often think of as being at the two word stage, and linguists have shown that children at that period express many different kinds of intentions (cf Brown 1972). We know that infants are thinking of many kinds of things that are quite removed from toileting activities, yet our insights have not had an impact on the singlemindedness of Freudian theory in this respect.

The penultimate stage of psychodynamic development is referred to as Oedipal, and is thus more applicable to males than to females, but this stage is the point at which, according to the theory, major personality events occur. The child, typically somewhere between four and six years old, is described as torn between a love of the opposite sex parent and, in the case of males, fear of the same sex parent, who is viewed as a powerful rival, capable of delivering terrible punishment in the form of castration. The Oedipal conflict is resolved through identification: the boy child elects to be like his father, and, in so doing, 1) adopts the attitudes, standards, opinions, and behaviors of the older generation and 2) decides to be a male. The Freudian construct of identification is one of the most widely accepted ideas in psychology, and virtually every

theory agrees that the child takes on the characteristics of the parent. Identification is invoked to explain how the child acquires a conscience, a superego, a moral system, and his or her sex role. Psychological health, or lack of it, depends on the successful resolution of this early family drama.

Once the Oedipal crisis is passed, the child's sexuality goes underground during the latency period, then re-emerges in early adolescence. If all has gone well, the young adult's psychosexual stage is now genital and he or she is capable of having a mature relationship with others and of engaging in meaningful work.

Whereas Freudian ideas are widely promulgated and accepted, it is never made clear how the child knows what the parent's moral system is, or how all of those rules of conscience can be internalized unless they have existed in some articulated form. The possibility that parents actually tell children what their moral system is must be considered, but, typically, it is not.

The most widely taught theories in developmental psychology are thus basically nonverbal. They assume that the child acquires the parent's beliefs and values, but they do not explain how the child is able to know the contents of those systems.

By contrast, the Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky, is perhaps the major developmentalist who has emphasized the role of language in children's development (Wertsch 1985). One widely used developmental psychology text devotes only two sentences to the work of Vygotsky (Mussen et al 1984, p. 194). Vygotsky and others of the Russian school have seen language as the single most important force in children's psychological development. Vygotsky also looks to internalization to explain psychological development, but, unlike the theorists referred to above, he also invokes a mechanism to explain how the adult's world becomes that of the child. His basic claim is that everything that becomes internal is first external: that children's minds are formed through interaction with others. This implies, of course, that adults actually say aloud the things that children come to internalize.

Vygotsky was much concerned with cognition and cognitive processes, the 'higher mental functions' such as thinking and consciousness for most of his short but remarkably productive life; his theory does not say much about adult influences on children's psychological development in other domains--their affective development and personality growth. These are topics that he began to investigate only toward the end of his life.

Cultural biases

There has been a general reluctance to look at the relationship between language and psychological development because of some biases inherent in our field, and perhaps in our culture: that is, our emphases on cognition and on individuation.

1. The emphasis on cognition over other kinds of development. The Stanford Child Language Research Forum, for instance has included innumerable papers on language and cognition over the years, and there is an honorable tradition in the field of looking to the relationship between them, arguing which is primary, and to what extent they are separate. We are much concerned with the cognitive prerequisites for language. We have no comparable tradition of looking at the relationship between language and affect and language and social development, thus lending a somewhat questionable air to these topics. The prevailing cultural bias in our research is that cognition is an intellectually respectable 'scientific' topic to study, whereas anything of a social nature is 'soft' and, hence, suspect. We might well ask, however: what are the social and affective prerequisites for language? Intelligence alone does not suffice to assure that language will be acquired. Michael Rutter, for instance, claims that autistic children lack the ability to extract social meaning from the world around them, and are not motivated to speak because of their affective deficits, rather than lack of cognitive ability. It now seems clear that cognitive level is not the only determinant of speech, assuming an intact speech system. Many mute autistic children who do not speak have quite adequate cognitive development. On the other hand, many socially oriented children with extremely low IQ do acquire language.

2. Our emphases on individuation. Another reason for our reluctance to look at language and emotional development is perhaps because emotional development is defined mostly through how one relates to others, and our view of linguistic development has been rather like some views of psychological development. Researchers have assumed that development means increasing individuation, an increasing separation of oneself from others. The linguistic view has been that development involves elaborating a set of intentions and learning to express them. The parallel view in psychology is that the individual must first attain his or her individual identity, and only then can intimacy with others be established. Humans, however, have relations with others from the first day of life, and it is clear that one of the functions of language is to help establish and maintain those relations. Because of our cultural bias, we tend to see children as moving toward cognitive and individual goals. Thus, children at the one word stage are described as 'referential' or 'expressive'. In the child language literature, the referential child is clearly regarded as more cognitively oriented, and, thus, superior to the expressive child. This bias toward the 'best and the brightest' is pervasive in our society. Yet it is not clear that the child who is supposedly referential is actually displaying a cognitive drive to name objects in the world. It may be that referential children, like expressive children, are motivated above all to maintain the attention, love and approval of their parents, and that naming things accomplishes just those ends with their middle class mothers.

Language has thus not been an important part of psychological theory, which has been elaborated in the absence of real data from developmental psycholinguistics. Developmental psycholinguistics, for its part, has devoted far more attention to cognitive correlates of language development than to the ways in which language may interact with the child's social and affective development. As for language addressed to children, our studies of parental input language have concentrated on structural features, rather than content, but there is an accumulating body of evidence that parents' speech may have an impact on children's psychological development.

Input language

In order to understand the possible relationship between language and psychological development, one kind of data that we must examine is the content and nature of parents' speech to children. One obvious way that parents affect their children and their children's language is that they teach them what to say on many occasions; it is not true that children say only those things for which they have developed intentionality. Quite to the contrary, some of the earliest things that children say are said in order to fulfill parental, and hence societal, intentions: greetings, thanks, farewells.

As for the less obvious effects of parent language on children's language, there is, as we all know, a major controversy in our field regarding the effects and non effects of parents' speech. The controversy rages most fiercely around syntax, which, happily, is not the topic here. Parents do explicitly teach some parts of language to children, however, especially many aspects of pragmatics.

In acquiring pragmatic skills children have their own intentions, which they must learn to express in socially appropriate ways; at the same time there are other pragmatic skills that they must acquire in order to be acceptable in society whether they possess the underlying intentions or not. Our own work has shown that routines are regularly explicitly taught by parents: such things as greetings, seasonal or holiday formulas, and other 'polite' expressions. We found, for instance, that only 7% of the preschoolers we studied in a laboratory said thanks spontaneously after being given a gift, but that 86% of those that were prompted by their parents (What do you say? Say thank you. What's the magic word?) said thanks after the parental prompt. Becker (1985) has shown that parents actively teach at least 16 different aspects of pragmatics, including rules about turn taking, interruptions, volume, speaking with the mouth full, etc.

Although the foregoing has been a discussion of parents' influence on children's language, the influence is not limited to language; children's ability to use language appropriately

has far reaching effects on their psychological functioning. Parents help children to become acceptably polite people; the child who, for instance, does not produce 'Hi', 'Thanks', and 'Goodbye' when they are called for engenders active hostility on the part of the visiting relative, the friend who brings her a birthday present, or the neighbor who drives the carpool. In teaching the child to be responsive to the linguistic and situational cues that call for various kinds of politeness, the parent is also teaching the child to become aware of the feelings and intentions of others.

In teaching pragmatic skills, the parent also helps the child to become an acceptable conversationalist. There is now a body of research that indicates that the ability to handle these pragmatic features and to perform accurately has far reaching psychological consequences: children who are poor conversationalists in kindergarten become isolated and unhappy; those who are verbally skilled, are far more likely to become leaders, to have high self esteem, and self confidence.

Input language about topics other than language can contain a great deal of material, psychological in nature, that may relate to the child's ultimate psychological development. There are also many kinds of ways that parents' language feeds into children's cognitive development: Catherine Snow (personal communication) has recently, for instance, examined the way parents use the word 'remember' when speaking to their children. She has shown that parents use the word to help children structure their own memorial processes; when they say things such as 'Remember when we went to grandma's?' they help the child to retrieve events from long term memory and to compare them with current information. When they use it in the future, ('Remember, we are going to grandma's next Sunday') they help the child to develop an understanding of the sequential structure of time.

The content of parents' speech to children can also be examined for insights into other aspects of children's psychological development, and for evidence that in the Vygotskyian sense the features of personality of the child that are internalized are actually first made explicit externally by the parent in the parent's speech. If this is the case, then we need not believe in obscure and magical processes whereby the child 'incorporates' the parent; it suffices to internalize the message that is carried in the parent's language. This, of course, presupposes a child who is disposed toward the parent, a child who is motivated to interact with and be rewarded by others.

Sex role development.

One area of psychological development that I have discussed earlier is that of sex role development. Some interesting recent work has shown that mothers speaking to their infant

daughters use more words relating to feelings and emotion than do mothers speaking to their sons. By the age of two, reliably more emotion words appear in the speech of girls than of boys (Dunn, Bretherton & Munn 1987). The possible differences in emotional responsivity between males and females that have been thought to be innate, may thus be structured by the parent; even if there are innate differences between the sexes in this and in other areas, it is clear that parental language can serve to amplify them (or for that matter, to minimize them). In our own laboratory we have found that fathers used more directives with their sons, more threatening language, more jocular names. David Bellinger and I found that fathers use more direct imperatives than mothers and more directives in general, and, although it did not reach significance, boys between the ages of three and five used a pattern of directives that was different from that of girls (Bellinger & Gleason 1982).

Clearly, there are some both subtle and explicit differences in parents' speech to boys and girls. These differences begin to emerge as soon as we look at content, rather than structure, although it is also obvious from the work on directives that syntactic devices associated with masculine or feminine style are also differentially employed. In looking at vocabulary, it is possible to find different emphases in areas other than that of affect, mentioned above. For example, we conducted a brief examination of the transcripts of Brown's subject Adam (2;7 to 3;11) and Sach's subject Naomi (1;6 to 3;8) which are in the Child Language Data Exchange System. We looked at the use of only two words, 'pretty' and 'strong' in these two families. It immediately becomes clear that 'strong' is a very common word used by the little boy and his family, and that 'pretty' is even more frequent in the little girl's family. (The word 'strong' does not appear at all in the first 10 Naomi transcripts, nor in many others.) The word 'pretty' occurs pervasively in the girl's family in respect to the child herself, to clothing, ribbons, flowers. She is even told 'snow, yes, pretty snow' (Naomi 02 1.136). The use of these adjectives may be exaggerated because of different family styles, but it is also true that cultural values about strength for boys and prettiness for girls are conveyed in the parents' language.

General aspects of personality

In addition to information about their sex role, parents also pass on to children a rather complex world view, which then becomes their own. It is of course difficult to specify how and when these things become internalized, assuming that much of it happens through language. We can get a glimpse of the way children acquire some aspects of culture through role play, for instance in Elaine Andersen's (1984) work with puppets. By the age of four or five children have access to a cultural stereotype for various roles: they know that babies say 'goo goo ga ga', and so on. Of course the stereotype is not real world knowledge, but it is evidence that children have internalized the verbal portions of these socially defined roles.

Another window on internalization, and one that is closer to psychological development, can be found in children's monologues. For instance, Ruth Hirsch Weir's famous (1970) volume on crib speech shows that by the age of 27 months her son Anthony, alone in his crib at night, practiced aloud many of the admonishments and other phrases he had heard from adults during the day:

Don't touch Mommy Daddy's desk
 Don't go on the desk
 Don't take daddy's glasses
 Make it all gone
 That's the boy
 I hope so
 Clean out the drawer
 Excuse me

(p. 121 & 134)

Our own research has concentrated on 24 families seen at home and in the laboratory; part of the work is aimed at looking at these broader aspects of parental input and the kinds of differences we see among families that might relate to different psychological outcomes in children. For instance, there is a good deal of variation in parent-child conversations along dimensions such as control and the kinds of knowledge parents impart.

For her doctoral dissertation Rivka Perlmann (1984) coded conversational topics at dinner along a continuum of focus ranging from most immediate to most general and abstract--categories that ranged from eating and keeping clean to talk about people and places one had seen that day, and finally, at the most abstract level, to general principles about how the world works. All families talked about immediate concerns, which occupied about half of all conversations; some families also talked about non-immediate concerns and about general principles.

What emerged as most interesting was that when we looked at measures of control in the parents' speech as well as measures of focus, a negative correlation was observed: the more directive the parents were in their speech to children, the less likely they were to provide information about the world in general, to play with language, or to talk about topics removed from the immediate situation. The examples of family conversation included here are provided by families with very different styles, even though the goal of both sets of parents is the same: to get their young son to eat the main course before eating dessert. There is clearly a marked qualitative difference between them: Frank's family conversation is centered on discipline and control whereas Charlie's family conversation is much less directive, is clearly playful, and provides world knowledge.

Two Family Conversations (from Perlmann, 1984)

(Frank's family)

Mother: Now I'm going to cut your roast beef, honey.

Child: I don't want to eat it.

Mother: Well, I thought you liked roast beef!

Child: I'm not going to eat it.

Mother: Why not?

Child: I'm too full.

Mother: Well, you eat what you drink, see? Okay if you don't eat this roast beef you have no more twinkies. You understand that?

Child: I'll eat one.

Mother: No, you'll eat half of it. I'll cut this much off.

Father: You just take it.

Child: This much.

Mother: Now, and if you do not ...

Child: Not that.

Mother: Frank, if you do not eat every bite of that you'll never buy a twinkie again. I'm telling you. I let you have half of it and this is my reward.

Child: You're so mean. If I'm full can I stop eating it?

Father: You taste it. It's very good.

Mother: You must eat some of this amount that I'm cutting up.

Child: What if I'm too full?

Mother: Well, you can eat it I'm sure. You chew it good.

Child: [whining and mumbling something unintelligible]

(Charlie's family)

Mother: Hey, Charlie? Come give one more try and then we'll have some dessert?

Child: No!!

Mother: Okay.

Child: I don't like it [whining]

Mother: Is it so hard, sweetie? How 'bout ... I'll tell you what, I'll make a switch with you.

Child: What?

Mother: Will you have a piece of turkey? Piece of chicken?

Child: No.

Mother: Like your sandwich.

Child: No, I wanna have cake first.

Mother: No, you can't have cake until you have something healthy. Cake is delicious, but you have something healthy first. I'll show what I'll give you instead. How's that?

Child: What?

Mother: Watch this.
 Child: No, I like cake.
 Mother: Oh, you can have cake too!
 Child: What's in there? [mother in another room]
 Mother: Will you eat a piece of this? [corn]
 Child: No!
 Mother: Okay, then no cake.
 Child: But mom, I want cake!

* * *

Child: I want some corn.
 Mother: There's a boy. Well, you can pick up the fork when you're ready, okay?
 Child: I'm ready.
 [Father laughs]
 Mother: There's the man.
 Father: But be careful, son. You're gonna get it on the rug. There you go.
 Mother: A triumph, Charlie.
 Child: I ate some corn.
 Mother: That was a brave thing to do.
 Child: Why?
 Father: 'Cause that will guarantee you a place in hea ... a place in heaven and a piece of cake.
 Child: It will not.
 Father: There you go. See that corn right there?
 Child: Yeah.
 Father: Let's try and clean that up.
 Mother: Can you do that by yourself?
 Child: I'm trying.
 Father: That's the way Japanese people eat rice, Charlie. Shove it off the side of the plate.
 Child: Now can I have some cake?

In terms frequently used in the child development literature, these parental styles are called authoritarian (Frank's) and authoritative (Charlie's); many studies, moreover, have correlated children's personalities with the kind of parenting style they have been exposed to. What has not been hitherto clear, is that these important dimensions of parental style are verbal dimensions: they are dimensions of input language.

Conclusions

I have been trying to suggest here that input language may have a far reaching effect on child development, well beyond any effects it might have on language development per se--that language is the medium whereby children acquire at least a portion of their sex role and social class or group characteristics as well as their world view, their emotional and psychological well being. This is not to deny the existence of inborn temperamental and intellectual qualities that are also important.

Obviously, parent behaviors as well as words also make a difference, but if we return to the developmental psychological literature it becomes clear that the basic theories, with the exception of Vygotsky's, are defective because they ignore language. A large body of research in child development tries to correlate parent behaviors and child outcomes. Mostly, this has been along the dimensions of warmth and coldness, permissiveness and restrictiveness. Children who are socially and emotionally competent tend to have authoritative parents. Children of authoritarian parents are more likely to have negative personality traits. Research on parents' language gives substance to the rather subjective terms 'authoritarian' and 'authoritative'. To be authoritarian means to use a particular verbal style: authoritarian parents provide many controlling statements and little general world knowledge to their children. Authoritative parents appear to be more emotionally responsive to their children--their explanations avoid direct orders and offer more world knowledge. Even in a subset of families from a fairly homogeneous community in Boston we find these differences in parents' verbal style.

At a more microscopic level, we can see in parent-child interchanges such phenomena as different use of adjectives about strength and beauty and about emotional states to boys and to girls. Some earlier work done in our lab by Esther Greif (1980) also showed that parents interrupt little girls more than they interrupt boys, which is interesting in light of the fact that women appear to be interrupted more than men as adults. One can well speculate that being construed as interruptable would have an effect on one's self perception and self esteem.

We obviously need to identify and provide a cohesive framework for the characteristics of parental input that we thing impact upon children's psychological development. Some of

this has already been done: The study by Dunn et al mentioned earlier shows that mothers speak more about emotional states to girls than to boys and that by the age of two girls are talking more about such states themselves. Recent research by Martin Seligman shows even more far reaching correlations between parental style and children's style; Seligman, cited by Daniel Goleman, found that children provide the same sorts of explanations as their mothers, that is that the tendency to be optimistic or pessimistic, to assume that one has control over aspects of the world, is related to maternal style:

'...researchers have found differences in explanatory style among children as young as the third grade. While there is not yet a firm theory of how people's explanatory styles are shaped, major influences seem to come from the attitudes of significant adults in a child's life, especially parents and teachers. Two studies comparing the explanatory styles of parents and their children have found that a mother's style, but not the father's, correlates highly with the styles of their children. That pattern suggests that social influence, not heredity, is at play.'

(Goleman 1987)

Explanatory style, in turn, has far reaching implications for health, longevity, and general emotional well being. For instance, people who explain their own failures by blaming themselves have a much greater susceptibility to disease than more optimistic people, are more likely to drink and smoke heavily, and to neglect themselves. They report twice as many colds and doctors' visits a year than those with an optimistic explanatory style.

Returning, then, to psychological theory, it becomes increasingly important to consider the ways that parental linguistic input may contribute to the psychological development of their children. Developmental psychology tells us that young children identify with their parents and take on the sex role and moral system of the parent. Language is used to shape the sex roles of children from their earliest days. We will also understand better what we mean by superego or conscience when we look at what parents are actually saying to children; the child, after all, does not simply impute her parents' moral system. The superego must consist originally of just those parental admonishments that we have begun to document, and which infants as young as two can be heard repeating to themselves in their presleep monologues.

Developmental psychologists recognize that internalization of parental characteristics through identification is a broad and pervasive aspect of the young child's personality development, yet internalization is treated rather as a magical process:

'In fact, many significant and complex patterns ...appear to be acquired by the child spontaneously without direct training or

reward--without anyone's teaching, and without the child's intending to learn.'

(Mussen, Conger, Kagen & Geiwitz 1979
p. 222)

The likely vehicle of transmission of these features of the parents' orientation and value system is the language directed to the child, in which a world view is made explicit. As linguists we have nearly 30 years of data on parent-child interaction which we can use, and should use, to show the crucial role that language plays in psychological development.

References

- Andersen, E. S. (1984). The acquisition of sociolinguistic knowledge: Some evidence from children's verbal role play. Western Journal of Speech Communication, 48, 125-144.
- Atkinson, R., Atkinson R.C. & Hilgard, E. (1981). Introduction to Psychology. Eighth edition. New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich.
- Becker, J. A. (1985). Pragmatic socialization: How parents teach preschoolers pragmatic skills in the home. Paper presented at the Boston University Conference on Child Language; Boston, MA.
- Bellinger, D., & Gleason, J. Berko. (1982). Sex differences in parental directives to young children. Sex Roles, 8, 1123-1139.
- Dunn, J., Bretherton, I., & Munn, P. (1987). Conversations about feeling states between mothers and their young children. Developmental Psychology, 23, 132-139.
- Freud, S. (1957). In J. Rickman (Ed.), A General Selection from the Writings of Sigmund Freud. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Gardner, H. (1982). Developmental Psychology. Second edition. Boston: Little Brown & Company.
- Goleman, D. Research Affirms Power of Positive Thinking. (1987). New York Times, 3 February.
- Greif, E. B. (1980). Sex differences in parent-child conversations. Women's Studies International Quarterly, 3, 253-258.
- Kohlberg, L. (1969). Stage and sequence: The cognitive-developmental approach to socialization. In D. A. Goslin (Ed.) Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research. New York: Rand McNally.
- Mischel, W. (1976). Introduction to Personality. Second edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Money, J. & Ehrhardt, A. E. (1972). Man & Woman Boy & Girl. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.
- Mussen, P.H., Conger, J.J., Kagan, J. & Geiwitz, J. (1979) Psychological Development: A Life-Span Approach. New York: Harper & Row.

- Mussen, P.H., Conger, J.J., Kagan, J. & Huston, A.C. (1984). Child Development and Personality. Sixth edition. New York: Harper & Row.
- Perlmann, R. Y. (1984) Variations in Socialization Styles: Family Talk at the Dinner Table. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston University.
- Schell, R. E. & Hall, E. (1983). Developmental Psychology Today. Fourth edition. New York: Random House.
- Skinner, B.F. (1938). The Behavior of Organisms. New York: Appleton, Century-Crofts.
- Weir, R. H. (1970) Language in the Crib. The Hague: Mouton.